

Asha UFlorida - UF Chapter of Asha for Education

Nov 2010

Volume 3

Asha Activities:

Projects Supported	1
Education Awareness Week	2
Gate River Run 2010	3
Asha UF Financial Summary	5
Praharsha	5
Shramdaan	7

Other Articles

- ◆ Journey of 9.3 miles in 5 months
- ◆ Our Hearts, Their Minds, One hope

Greetings,

The year 2009 was a wonderful year and so has been 2010 for Asha UFlorida, popularly known as 'Gators for Asha', in terms of the awareness we have been able to spread and the amount of funds we have been able to collect through different activities. This wouldn't have been possible without the generous support from donors and patrons or without the dedicated efforts of our volunteers. As a result we have been able to support more projects and help more children realize their dream of education.

A summary of the activities and financial information has been provided in this newsletter. We would like to thank all our patrons and donors for the support and the volunteers for their valuable time and efforts and hope this synergistic endeavor will help eradicate illiteracy in due time.

Asha UFlorida Team

Projects Supported by Asha UFlorida



Payir

Location: Thenur Village, Tamil Nadu

The project focuses on two programs.

1. Non-formal education center: This learning center aims to create rural leaders who excel in rural knowledge and craft. Payir believes that the eventual ownership & implementation of ideas of holistic community development should come from and be owned by the community having its own set of leaders and experts. The project also provides temporary accommodation for children of migratory workers so that their education is not hampered.

2. Intervention program: It provides existing teachers with additional training on activity based teaching and other non-formal methods. Payir also aims to introduce a number of systemic changes needed to increase the percentage of attendance in government schools

FORWARD

(Forum for women's rights and development)

Location: Tambaram, Tamil Nadu

The project aims to provide life awareness education with quality to the oppressed and marginalized children of dalits & tribals through 12 evening schools that complement their primary education. FORWARD believes that the need of the hour is a complete social transformation which can be achieved by education of the oppressed and the marginalized, especially the younger generation. This kind of education should comprise life awareness education with quality in addition to the formal school education. The non-formal remedial education complements a child's daytime primary education and addresses issues such as poverty, injustice, and oppression in the name of cast, gender and religion and works toward establishing a just society by encouraging community involvement.

Trinita

Location: Kolkata, West Bengal

The need to help the poor people living in the slums and to uplift the appalling conditions of health and education in the slums of Kolkata, Howrah and neighboring areas as also in the district towns, was the inspiration behind starting the group by women social activists. People living in these slums earn their livelihood by doing menial jobs. The low social status of women and children coupled with unsanitary and unsafe living conditions makes the children very vulnerable physically, socially and economically. Trinita is trying to lead them towards a more constructive and peaceful sustainable life.

It adopted a right-based approach towards child labor by supporting 100 children working in leather sector in Topsia in the first phase.



Militha

Location: 46 villages of Anantapur district in the state of Andhra Pradesh.

The program (meaning 'inclusion') was started in 2001 to improve the quality of life and rehabilitation for a few hundred disabled individuals by early childhood stimulation, inclusion in peer groups, games, education, household activities, and increasing livelihood options. It's a joint collaboration with Timbaktu Collective, which focuses on landless, small and marginal farmers with special emphasis on women, children, youth and dalits.

The major goal is to support disabled people and their families in forming their own organizations to promote and protect their rights and provide services to disabled people.



Education Awareness Week

Asha UFlorida in collaboration with 'Children Beyond our Borders', another like minded student organization at the University of Florida working with underprivileged children in Colombia, organized the first annual Education Awareness Week between Feb 8th-Feb 12th 2010. The objective of the event was to sensitize the local community and students about the needs of children in developing countries and to highlight the importance of education. Events ranged from a panel discussion on children in developing nations, documentary movie screening ('War Dance' and 'Autism The Musical') pertaining to children in different parts of the globe, and a talk on sustainable community development from an experienced grass-root activist from India. All events were free and open to all and were well received.



Team Asha - Train. Run. Educate



Gate River Run 2010



Team Asha after Gate River Run 2010

The Gate River Run (GRR), formerly known as the Jacksonville River Run, is an annual 15K road race in Jacksonville, Florida that attracts both competitive and recreational runners. It has been the US National Championship 15K since 1994 and in 2007 became the largest 15K race in the country. It "was voted [as] one of the top US Road Races for last 20 years by Runner's World Magazine."

This 15 km run is one of the initiatives taken by our chapter to raise awareness and funds for the educational projects in India. The association of Asha UFlorida and Team Asha was formed in 2007 when participating in the 15 km Gate River run in Jacksonville for the first time on 10th March 2007. Since then, every year our chapter has been participating in the Gate River Run with tremendous success. Over the past 4 years, our team has managed to raise more than \$ 48,000.

A total of 36 volunteers participated in this year's race held on March 13th, coached by our beloved coaches Dana and Rick and were able to collect about \$ 18,000. The collected funds will be used for the various projects being supported by the chapter.

Team Asha Speaks...

"Running with Team Asha is an experience in itself. Being with such an enthusiastic group, motivates you, inspires you and gives you the strength to run that extra mile when needed. One of the most aspiring times of my life has been spent with Team Asha" - Mukul

"Starting running was fun...but for all the motivation one needs to train enough for the 9 miler, running with the group of fun people at Team Asha is exactly what one can ask for. The amazing feeling of throngs of people cheering you as you run along the roads of Jax and the even more exhilarating feeling of running with tens of thousands of runners of all ages - even the formidable 9 miles leaves one with the feeling of wanting more of it" - Anirudh

"Training with Team Asha was one of the best things that happened to me at Gainesville. I always had an inclination towards sports. But running the Gate river run (especially along St. John's river and the Hart bridge) was amazing and exciting at a whole different level." - Bharani

From Our Coaches

"Asha is a perfect match for us. We believe in social justice, fairness, education and the importance of helping one another through community enterprise. We are proud to be coaching the Asha Running Team." Coaches Rick and Dana spring 2007.

Over four years later the above quote rings truer than ever! Being involved with the Asha UF Running Team has not only given us the opportunity to play a small part in building a better world but also has played a large part in building a better life for ourselves. It is in every sense of the words a win win proposition. And it can be the same for any of us. The two building blocks of volunteerism and running enhance both the collective and the individual. As a fundraiser at our University of Florida Asha chapter the running team has been unparalleled. And the running team has also been unequaled as a tool for building camaraderie between the wide variety of Asha volunteers.

When you join the Asha running team you will meet a group of like minded individuals. They understand why U.S. president John F Kennedy implored us to "ask not what your country can do for you ask what you can do for your country." They understand why a running shoe company chose the acronym ASICS for their name, "anima sana in corporo sano" a sound mind in a sound body. They understand why a student based group that wants to create a better world named their organization Asha. They understand Hope.



In many ways both volunteering and running have the unique ability to allow us to step both inside and outside of ourselves. When we volunteer we reach internally to help externally, when we run we are not only our minds, our egos, our dreams but also the animal we are born to be. In both cases we become a part of a much larger whole. We develop a sense of peace and a sense of belonging. Could this esoteric vision be your Team Asha experience? There's only one way to find out, join the Asha Running Team. Help the world and help yourself. You'll be glad you did.

Team Asha UF meets to train throughout the year on Tuesday and Thursday evenings and Saturday mornings. We are endurance athletes of all abilities, walkers, runners and a little of both. Besides meeting to train we have potlucks, go on hikes, attend plays and movies, celebrate holidays and hang out together. Four years ago I was just starting to hear about Asha. Now many of my best friends are Asha members.

This year's team will train for The Gate River Run 15k held in Jacksonville on March 12, 2011. We will kick off formally in early November but there's no need to wait to make new friends and join the fun. Go to http://sports.groups.yahoo.com/group/AshaUf_running/ and start today.

Rick
Dana

A Journey of 9.3 Miles in 5 Months

- Lokendra Bengani

Every journey begins with one step no matter how long the journey is. That step was taken in Sept 09 when I was introduced to Team Asha. I thought I was a hopeless case. At first glance, seldom someone would have considered that I could run and no one would have believed that I would later attempt a 9.3 mile run. But the folks of Team Asha have optimisms of a different kind. On my first day I barely managed a meager 1.8 mile. It took me quite some effort to do my 1st 3 miler taking 45 mins. It was only possible due to Dana and her most fascinating banter. She would tell about her strategy and goals for the "beginners" (read "me") and how they were to accomplish the target. I used to laugh in my mind with the background of my own version of Aerosmith singing "Dream on, Dana dream on." Then came the segment of pains and aches. It started in my back, then in my shins and then cramps in stomach. With Rick's help and a new set of running shoes the pain in my shins ceased and the correct technique and speed of run/walk helped with back pain. Rarely did I use to run all the way. I preferred interval training since it gave me less pain and a better time.

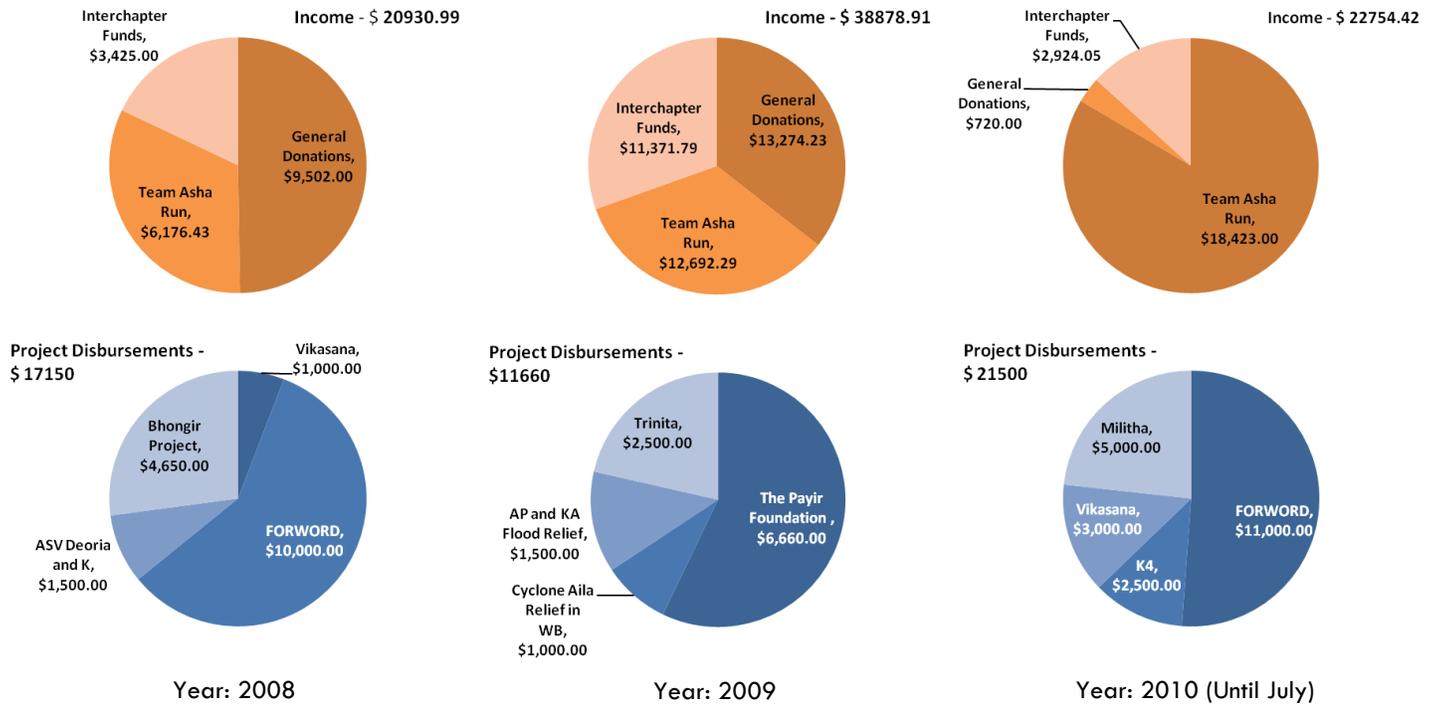
After a break in December, I truly began my preparation for Gate River Run (GRR). Dana's incredible spirit and Rick's supervision and clear-cut timetable suddenly became my biggest armaments. Along with this the thought that this was being done so that I would be in a position to bring a difference in the lives of hundreds of children back in India made me determined to achieve my targets. Everyone cheered and applauded each other for reaching personal bests. Targets were set and met. From 10 miles a week to finally 16 miles was accomplished in 2 months. The longest I had done was 8 mi and Rick assured me that it was enough. And then the day arrived.

I never anticipated that a run could be so much fun. But when 15000 people start a 15000 meter race at the same time, you literally get carried away in a sea of enthusiasm. The runners (old and young alike) included children, a woman in a wheelchair, firemen with their cylinders, men and women with children in strollers and people from every background. People were cheering from street sides and homes, giving out water, Gatorade and strawberries. The route passed through main streets with high rises and river sides with the most amazing view. Bands were playing great music. At one point I forgot that I was there for a run. It was not until mile 7 that my legs began to relent and stomach started cramping. I was already among the slowest runners and couldn't afford to slow down any more as I had 2.3 more miles to complete. The most ironical part was the bridge at mile 8. It is a mile long. My shins surrendered on the way to the top of the bridge. But the view and wind were spectacular. For the last 30 sec I amassed every ounce of energy and ran as fast as I could in spite of the cramps. And with a leap in the air I finished the race. It took me 135 minutes but I did it. Also, through the generous donations from my supporters I had managed to raise \$614. And I thank them all once again for it.



Join Team Asha for running practice at Kirkwood Trail on Tuesdays and Thursdays and at Hawthorne Trail on Saturdays. For more information contact Vikas - vicky.aggarwal@gmail.com or join Yahoo! Groups [AshaUf_running](http://sports.groups.yahoo.com/group/AshaUf_running/)

Asha UF Finances



Praharsha '10 - A Festival of Hope and Happiness

Praharsha the annual cultural show organized by Gators for Asha was held on August 28th. It was a 3 hour long event showcasing a potpourri of performances in dance, music and drama giving the audience a feel for Indian culture. The event also had presentations about Asha for educations mission and activities thereby increasing the visibility among the student community. About 700 people attended the event and food was provided at the end of the event free of cost. A part of the food was donated by Taj Grill and Curry, India Bazaar and Classic Fare Catering. The event was mainly sponsored by UF Student Government funding with additional sponsorship from Fifth Element Restaurant, Mayuri Indian Cuisine (Jacksonville), Infinite Energy (Gainesville), India Bazaar (Gainesville), and Taj Curry and Grill (Gainesville). About \$300 was raised through donations.



Our Hearts, Their Minds, One Hope

Why I volunteer for Asha ...

- Sanketh Bhat

"Education frees us and gives us wings to fly"-- Anonymous

Almost 49 million school-age children in India do not attend school and conservative estimates are that over 11 million Indian children under 14 are engaged in child-labor. Unfortunately, 29% (over 317 million) of India's population lives below the national poverty line and 35% (over 329 million) of the global illiterate population lives in India. Are these just statistics? Or Must something be done?

America calling

I arrived at Gainesville, FL to pursue my graduate studies in the University of Florida in mid-December 2006. Being holiday season, one of the largest university towns of US having a population of over about 0.2 million with over 55000 students had a deserted look. Just when I was getting bored having nothing to do, with commencement of classes a good 3 weeks away, I got an e-mail on the Indian students group of the university. It said 'Shramdaan - come and volunteer in the basketball event' and help the underprivileged children in India. Basketball and football are huge events in the 'Gator Nation' (gator is the UF mascot) winning three national championships in a year. With the initial excitement to see and meet new people, I agreed to volunteer for the event. That's when I got introduced to Asha UFlorida popularly known as 'Gators for Asha', the University of Florida (UF) chapter of Asha for Education.

The Gators roar

'Asha for Education' is an all-volunteer global non-profit organization. It was born out of the desire to bring hope to the lives of underprivileged children in India. Gators for Asha (Asha UFlorida) was started by five UF students back late in 2003 and in a span of seven years, we have grown and have supported many educational and health care projects in our country.

Why do I volunteer for Asha ?

India has the highest number of NGO's in the world. Among the plethora of NGO's, why did I choose Asha ?

Being a volunteer of Asha for 3 years now, having been associated with a few projects, speaking to people outside Asha about the organization, my motivation to volunteer with this organization has only grown and I am proud to be associated with a part of this group.

- **Asha exists for projects** – The group being made up of students and professionals from different fields are sufficiently motivated to see our projects and children in our projects are doing well
- **Flat structure, non-hierarchical, bottom-up approach** – In this age of globalization and top-down corporate structures, here we are shaking of this trend and silently and steadily inching towards our goal. Asha will soon be entering its 20th

year.

- **Volunteer driven** – Being completely volunteer driven, every volunteer has a choice on how much time or what (s)he wants to contribute to, of course, within the frameworks of Asha
- **Zero-overhead policy** – Asha has a zero-overhead policy so every penny of donations go directly towards projects.

These are some of the more generic reasons most volunteers will give. But what gravitated me to Asha UFlorida are some of the reasons listed below:

- Asha UFlorida consciously makes an effort to support smaller NGO's and pilot projects
- We don't want our project partners to do the government's job. We proactively make an effort to make sure our project partner are an extended part of the local governing bodies and supplement governments work
- We understand that big is not always better, it is not always beneficial to talk about scalability and that no development is possible unless the local community wants it. One of Asha's strengths in my opinion is that we motivate individuals and groups who want to be facilitators of such a positive change in their community.

But a question lurks in my mind, 'Is what we are doing enough?', then I understand a journey of thousand steps begins with the first one..this is only the beginning.

*And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.*

-Robert Frost

Sanketh is a Graduate Student in Mechanical and Aerospace engineering and has been involved with Asha for 4 years including serving as the coordinator for the year 2009



Shramdaan

- Vinod Natarajan

Volunteering can always be a fun-filled activity, and when it is done for a cause as noble as "Education for Children", then there is so much value that accrues to the fun. "Shramdaan" or "Donation by means of voluntary labor" is one such activity which is undertaken by "Gators for Asha" at the University of Florida. Football and sports, generally, is a madness almost equivalent to a religion at the land of the Gators! There are scores of fans - students and old people alike - who come and attend these games. What Asha does is sign a contract with an agency running the "Concession Stands" for a year to run the stands during the game. On the game day, volunteers from Asha "run" the stand - sell food and drinks - to the fans who come to watch the game. There are about 8-10 volunteers in every game who completely are in control of the stand right from preparing, packaging, and selling food stuff. Asha gets 10% of the sales made on that day!



This is an amazing experience in itself. Not only there is the very drive to work for such a noble cause and generate funds for it, one can take home personal gains like teamwork, coordination, and great customer interaction experience. You get to make a lot of new friends by working close with them, and also a great incentive is that you can get a peek of the game, without having to buy tickets!. Summing up, it is a very enriching and satisfying experience and a few hours well spent for Asha and the future of a few unfortunate children, Gators for Asha would like a lot of volunteers to volunteer for Shramdaan- to make lives of a few kids better!

"When Tim Tebow was busy winning games for Gators, we were busy helping Gator fans keep their spirit up!!! It is fun to work at these stands, and at the end of the day gives you a feeling that you might be the reason that a kid has a smile." - Vivek

Join Gators for Asha in Shramdaan and get to cheer the Florida Gators Football team as well!!! . For more information contact Vinod - vinodn85@gmail.com

Community Involvement

Over the last couple of years, Gators for Asha has also been involved with several local community service activities, some of which are listed below

Williams Elementary School: Asha UFlorida organized a mini India Fest at the Williams Elementary school to raise awareness about Indian culture. The show started with a small interactive presentation about India followed by a small skit and Indian dances. There were also sessions on Vedic Math, Indian costumes and Mehendi.

India Fest: The Indian Cultural and Education Center (ICEC) at Gainesville organizes India Fest annually to showcase Indian dances, cuisine, art and culture etc aimed at raising awareness about India in the Indian Gainesville community. Asha volunteers help out with setting up stalls, selling food and other logistic needs.

St. Francis House: The St. Francis House in Gainesville provides emergency food and temporary shelter for homeless people in Alachua County. A group of Asha volunteers took part in a service event organized by Tau Beta Pi where the volunteers cooked and served food for the homeless.

Altrusa House is an adult day health care facility that provides for the socialization and safety of frail, elderly and disabled adults. Asha UFlorida volunteers organized India Nite for the entertainment of the old people at the Altrusa house.





300-9, JW Reitz Union,
P.O. Box 118505,
Gainesville, FL 32611

Website: <http://www.ashanet.org/uflorida>
E-Mail: uflorida@ashanet.org

What is Asha for Education?

Asha for Education is a non-profit secular organization with chapters all over the world. Our goal is to help sustain educational projects for underprivileged and oppressed children in India. Over the years, Asha has succeeded in touching the lives of thousands of children through a variety of projects by disbursing millions of dollars to hundreds of projects. Asha, meaning "hope" in Hindi, reflects what we want to provide for these kids. Asha-UFlorida, founded in Fall 2003, is an action group of profession-

als and students from UF and the Gainesville-North Central FL region. We intend to mobilize the local community by raising awareness and getting its support to promote basic education in India. Each one of our projects undergoes careful investigation prior to providing them with sponsorship and funding. Once we make the commitment, we maintain a close personal involvement with each project through regular site visits and calls. We also like to contribute to the local community by volunteering at old age homes, homeless shelters and schools.

Our Objectives:

- To provide an opportunity for individuals who wish to contribute towards the welfare and education of underprivileged children in India.
- To support and synergize with people and groups already engaged in similar activities.
- To rally support and monetary resources to achieve the group's objectives.
- To address and raise awareness of primary healthcare, welfare and other socio-economic issues.



No one has yet realized the wealth of sympathy, the kindness and generosity hidden in the soul of a child. The effort of every true education should be to unlock that treasure. - Emma Goldman

How you can contribute

Financially

Support Asha for Education through monetary donations. Even \$20 can make a big difference. You can donate online at: <http://ashanet.org/uflorida/donate.html> or send checks payable to 'Asha for Education' to the address above.

Volunteering

Volunteer during fundraising events, spread the word, attend our meetings and contribute with suggestions and ideas.

Asha for Education is a non-profit, zero-overhead organization registered with the IRS. All donations are tax-exempt under section 501(C) 3. We have no administrative costs and every penny of your contribution goes directly to the projects.

We are always looking for sponsors. If you or your company are interested, please email us or visit our website. Also, send us your comments, questions, or article submissions by email.